Review: [Untitled]

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The Trouble with Hanna by Costa-Gavras
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made in the story. Whereas Verne's readers rarely have any doubt as to the veracity of Salsa's death, attributing Teleke's easy acceptance of her apparent resuscitation to the vain hope of a heartsick lover, the movie places its audience in a much more ambiguous position. The viewer is forced to share Teleke's experience along with him—unable to distinguish between the film we are watching and Gorz's motion picture within the film—gradually becoming ever more sure that Salsa is indeed alive, until a reunion of the lovers is fully expected. The uncertainty as to whether such a switch in the plot will occur is heightened by Teleke's sighting of Salsa inside a glass room —seemingly asleep and under the hypnotic spell of Gorz—and the impressionistic, tinted flashbacks of her death, contrasting with the extremely crisp, supra-lifelike vision of her singing in the castle. But just at the moment a rescue is expected, a miscarried experiment of Orfanik's damages the castle, shattering the windows of Salsa's glass room. In a scene as shocking and unexpected as any since *Psycho,* Teleke discovers that all that remains of her is dust, a wig, and an air compressor to give her dress the motion of breathing—Orfanik had merely preserved her lifelike corpse in an air-tight chamber for Gorz's gaze.

As Gorz, unfazed, prepares to watch his motion picture recording one more time, it becomes obvious why Salsa has only been seen in the castle from a static angle, repeating the same song: Gorz has been playing the same clip from her last performance over and over. But Orfanik revolts against his cruel mentor before Gorz's mad ecstasy can be resumed. In a comic romp of death staged in front of Salsa's remains, the scientist and Gorz kill each other, destroying the motion picture; the castle is detonated in a pseudo-atomic explosion. Teleke barely manages to escape, but the journal he has hopefully retrieved of Orfanik's experiments only finds its way to ignominy in a bureaucratic vault, becoming food for rats. Thus, underlying the film is a fundamentally bleak view of all aspects of life and society, corresponding to the pessimistic mood of Verne's later work.

The Mysterious Castle in the Carpathians takes Verne beyond the realm of prophecy into a reflection of the nature of cinema and our tendency to accept whatever image is presented as reality. By the conclusion the audience has been jolted from its complacency, by the contradictory twists of the plot and the denial of the expected happy ending, to a greater awareness of the potential for manipulation in the medium. Not only have the movies been exposed as deceptive, but so has science, which is portrayed here as variously failed and self-destructive. Certainly the treatment of false appearances in opera and film is handled in a light-hearted, playful manner, but this should not preclude *The Mysterious Castle in the Carpathians* from our attention, for despite—even because of—the comic style, this is a highly self-conscious work demanding recognition on multiple levels.

—BRIAN TAVES

Orfanik and Gorz

THE TROUBLE WITH HANNA

Produced and directed by Costa-Gavras. Script: Franco Solinas, from an original screenplay by Solinas and Costa-Gavras. Photography: Ricardo Aronovich. Music: Gabriel Yared. Universal.

Traditionally, Hollywood's depiction of Arabs has taken the form of either fanatic, cold-blooded terrorists in films such as *Black Sunday* (1977) and *Raid on Entebbe* (1976) or exotic-sensual figures in films that include *The Sheik* (1921), *Kismet* (1944, remake 1955), *Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves* (1944) and *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962). Films with negative images, in which Arabs constitute "bad objects" within the narrative, provide easy targets for ideological analysis. But, as Robert Stam[1] has pointed out, films which present "positive images" are often intrinsically lim-

ited by their conformity to liberal shibboleths. *Lawrence of Arabia,* for example, "orientalizes the orient," to borrow Edward Said's terminology, by constructing a romantic vision of "Arab otherness." Arabs are equated with the desert, and the only two urban sequences set in the Middle East concentrate on the British, as if the Arab world is merely a huge desert, much as Tarzan's Africa is merely a huge jungle. Topographical reductionism, among other distorted images, reflects the film's dynamic of positive portrayals whose facade of sympathy is simultaneously contrasted and counteracted by the cinematic style. Costa-Gavras's *Hanna K.* is the first Hollywood feature to deal with the Palestinian question from a sympathetic vantage point. But the film, despite its attempts to transcend its precursors, in some ways continues a negative tradition. It endeavors to negate dominant ideology concerning the Arab world, but basically still affirms Western modes of representing the Orient.

With the exception of his first feature, Costa-Gavras's work has always been noted for its passionate engagement with political controversy. Even in his earliest films, he was concerned with the disparity between "law" and justice, and attentive to the inherently repressive nature of many political systems. *Z* (1969), for example, emphasizes the restrictions on political liberty imposed by the junta in Costa-Gavras's native Greece during the mid-sixties. *Missing* (1982), similarly, explores violations of legal due process in a country that unmistakably evokes the reality of Pinochet's Chile. Yet, these controversies are always sugarcoated (and coded), and the generic gloss of the thriller or courtroom drama is always a prerequisite, fusing political sensationalism with the codes of commercial cinema. Although *Hanna K.* was hailed as a politically significant film because of its relatively compassionate treatment of the plight of the Palestinians (as well as predictably being denounced as anti-Israeli propaganda), it is "essentially unpolitical," to quote an official of the Israeli film division. This view was also echoed by American reviewers who constantly drew parallels with George Cukor's *Adam's Rib* (1949) and were understandably baffled by the film's oscillation between a saccharine romantic quadrangle and unfocused social commentary. It is difficult to believe that this murky film was scripted by the same man who wrote Pontecorvo's *Battle of Algiers* (1968), but the exigencies of international coproduction (with Universal Studios as a major participant) were probably responsible for the film's compromised, not to mention confusing, political and narrative orientation. Unfortunately, Costa-Gavras seems to have become, in the words of Pauline Kael, "the European Stanley Kramer." It is interesting to note that the film was produced with the full cooperation of the Israeli government and the same official remarked: "We got favorable publicity for being liberals. Had we made problems for Costa-Gavras, the left-wing press would have had a field day."[2] This statement, unwittingly, reflects the basically reformist nature of Costa-Gavras's work. The limitations of his approach, as a paradigm for politically engaged cinema, were illuminated by a series of debates conducted during the ferment of the post '68 period; Comolli and Narboni were particularly critical of films that strove for political significance but did not essentially challenge the ruling ideology, or its language and imagery.

In *Hanna K.,* the complexities of the Arab-Israeli conflict are superficially treated and undermined through stereotypical characterizations. Lacking a fully developed political consciousness, Hanna functions within a purely individualistic and humanistic framework, unlike her real-life counterparts: the famous Israeli women lawyers, Lea Tsemal and Felicia Langer. Similarly, the aggressive Israeli District Attorney, Joshua Herzog (played by the Irish actor Gabriel Byrne) represents a cliched vision of a *macho* sabra whose reactionary sentiments are meant to correspond to those of all Israelis. The specific nature of the Palestinians' political affiliations, on the other hand, are never explicitly spelled out. Isolated from any Arab social context, the principal Palestinian character, Selim Bakri, remains an enigma throughout the film. Although Arabs are present during the lengthy courtroom sequences, there is not even a hint of what personal or political affinities they might have in common. This structuring absence is somewhat reminiscent of films such as *Algiers* (1938) and *Casablanca* (1942) which virtually exclude the presence

of Arabs on their own soil. The predilection for foregrounding Western characters and preoccupations led *Hanna K.* to be disparagingly referred to as "An Unmarried Woman in Israel."

In several interviews, Costa-Gavras reiterated his intention to explore the Palestinian-Israeli conflict through a woman protagonist. In this sense Hanna Kaufman, played by Jill Clayburgh, becomes the key to unveiling the effects of the Israeli legal system upon Palestinians, and the relationship of this official apparatus to questions of justice. The film, however, is almost hopelessly marred by the fact that the central role was terribly miscast. It was truly preposterous to assign this part to an actress who would seem more at home in a family drama set in the Middle West than in a "semi-engaged, single, pregnant mother" drama set in the Middle East. Her waspish persona in films such as Mazursky's *An Unmarried Woman* (1978) and Pakula's *Starting Over* (1979) is transferred to this vastly different social and political context. This miscasting raises the ideological quandary of absolutely equating the American Jew with American hegemonic culture. In happy contrast to Clayburgh's unfamiliarity with the film's milieu, Muhamad Bakri's identification with his character, Selim Bakri, even took the form of having identicial surnames, a decision jointly arrived at by Costa-Gavras and Bakri himself. Paradoxically, Selim Bakri's function within the narrative is a subsidiary one, although his plight is the thematic focus of the film.

The films of Costa-Gavras that deal with third-world issues—*State of Siege* (1973), *Missing* and *Hanna K.*—are focalized through a first-world protagonist. This strategy, which filters all points of view through a single, dominant perspective, raises questions concerning what the Russian literary critic Boris Uspensky terms "the norms of the text." All ideological points of view, both Palestinian and Israeli, are integrated into Hanna's perspective. The ideology of the narrator-focalizer, as Uspensky remarks, is usually understood as authoritative and all other ideologies in the text are evaluated from this privileged position. Here Hanna's preoccupations, both romantic and legal, are incorporated into this privileged position, a contrivance that evokes the even more romanticized narrative structure of *Lawrence of Arabia.* David Lean's film emphasizes the charismatic personality of the English Lawrence whose vitality eclipses Arab political consciousness and who seems to single-handedly inspire the Arab struggle for independence. *Hanna K.,* with its sincere but superficial compassion, continues, therefore, the romantic subgenre of exotic travelogues, inevitably both ethnocentric and introspective.

The film, like other recent "Middle East thrillers" (*Circle of Deceit* and *The Little Drummer Girl*), constructs a dynamic in which a first-world protagonist invariably explains third-world oppression. This device is designed to make the film's didactic thrust palatable to a Western audience. In the courtroom sequences, for example, Hanna not only speaks for Selim but also is foregrounded within the shot, standing closer to the spectator. Dialogue and *mise-en-scène* become, therefore, essential components of her dominance within the narrative, perpetually orienting the spectator to Clayburgh's apolitical humanism. At the same time, the narrative structure allows the spectator to know only as much as Hanna knows. When Hanna follows Selim, for example, she is not cognizant (nor are the spectators) that he is planning to demonstrate to her the enormity of Palestinian suffering. The penultimate sequence in which Selim lures Hanna to an abandoned refugee camp is one more stage in the process of her ongoing education. The Western spectator's consciousness is deemed inseparable from Hanna's world view, a process at the core of the film's underlying assumptions. In effect, the film can be seen as a *Bildungsroman* which chronicles Hanna's journey from ignorance to a relative awareness of political and sexual inequalities.

Focalization is not the only device which enables *Hanna K.* to maintain a tone of rather schematic didacticism. The classical structure of repetition, characteristic of the *Bildungsroman,* corresponds to sporadic repetitions within the film. An understanding of the film's overall structure, as well as individual sequences, can be illuminated by the concept of narrative rhyming. The best example of this kind of rhyming sequence occurs when Hanna attempts to establish the facts concerning Selim's claim to his ancestral house. At the

very beginning of the sequence, a sign identifies Kfar Rimon, a recently constructed Israeli village. The end of the sequence provides an analogical contrast to Hanna's initial encounter with the cheerful residents of Kfar Rimon. An Arab shepherd, walking near the remnants of an Arab village, despairingly cries: "This is Kfur Rumaneh." The opposition of the new houses to the village's ruins, and the opposition of the written sign of the Hebrew Kfar Rimon to the oral pronouncement of the Arabic Kfur Rumaneh, outlines the contrast between present transparency and past invisibility. This contrast is further explored within the sequence itself, which partially takes place in Selim's former house. Hanna learns to connect these two polarities with a discovery of a family photograph that corresponds to the one Selim had given her. Concurrently, a group of tourists gawk at Selim's house, and their naivete is contrasted with Hanna's newly transformed consciousness. This contrast is reinforced through blatant visual irony, since the tour-guide scene juxtaposes a Koranic inscription on the gate of Selim's house with a subsequent shot of the tourists, one of whom wears a hat labelled "Welcome to Israel." The visual rhetoric of this segment reflects the antinomies of the secular and the sacred, commercialism and tradition, and permanence and transience. The inscription itself ("I shall adore not that which you adore—nor will you adore that which I adore") demystifies cliched western notions of Islamic fanaticism.

The similarities of key events and circumstances are also apparent in the film's opening and conclusion. Already in the opening sequences, Gabriel Yared's music, replete with Arabic leitmotifs, delineates the basic terms of the conflict that will later emerge. A static shot of an Arab woman and child seated beneath a typical oriental house is soon eclipsed by a pan following Israeli soldiers coming out of a doorway. Selim, suddenly, is forcibly removed from a well that has served as his hiding place. After a brief interrogation by Israeli soldiers, the owner's house is detonated. The reason for Selim's taking refuge in the well is never made completely apparent to the audience, and the question of his participation in political violence remains ambiguous, an ambiguity that continues throughout the very sequence that ends the film. The television

Fatal mismatch: Selim Bakri, Hanna K.

news broadcast that announces a terrorist bombing reinforces the relationship of Selim to the recent political turmoil. The film ends as it began, with his escape from Israeli authorities, and the last shot of armed soldiers echoes the opening. Whereas classical patterns of repetition yield narrative closure, *Hanna K.*, paradoxically, employs an open-ended pattern of repetition. (Despite this facade of modernism, the film utilizes classical shooting style and editing techniques.) Does this seem to imply that Selim's perpetual flight dooms him to being a "wandering Palestinian"?

Ironically, the "wandering Palestinian" is analogous to the traditional romantic myth of the "wandering Jew." As with many *Bildungs* stories, the protagonist's quest adheres to a pattern of repetition, either circular or spiral. Hanna's literal pilgrimage from the US to Israel evokes a kind of Wilhelmina Meisterin travelogue. Furthermore, the irony is doubled when one considers the fact that a straightforward political expose ends up resembling a secular grail story, accompanied by the archetypal tropes of redemption and moral edification. The Christian theodicy in its secular version is superimposed on a primarily Jewish and Muslim Israel. Costa-Gavras's attempt to criticize a discriminatory system is, paradoxically, mirrored in his own unconscious condescension, continuing the Western heritage of objectifying the Orient. The "academic and imaginative demonology of the 'mysterious Orient'"[3] permeates, for example, sexual relationships, typified by the romanticist tendency to structure the Orient as an exotic otherness. Selim is marginalized by Hanna in a manner not unlike the traditionally Western

male fetishization of Oriental women, reminiscent of Flaubert's insistent desire to omnisciently recount Salambo's thoughts and emotions. The Oriental, whether a man or a woman, remains an enigma, never completely satisfying the desire of the romanticist-author and reader/spectator to project his/her fantasies on an amorphous object. This contradiction is inextricable from the problems inherent to *Hanna K.* Costa-Gavras and Franco Solinas criticize Israeli policy by having Selim complain to Hanna: "They would not listen to me . . . they would not hear me." The filmmakers, however, fall prey to parallel modes of hierarchical representation. Thus, they will not listen to or hear Selim, either.

This type of hierarchical representation not only inflicts itself upon the images of Palestinians, but also distorts Israeli reality through Americanized characterizations and linguistic manipulation. The same incongruous logic implies that Jill Clayburgh is an Israeli, and coincides with the rationale that the English of Hollywood scripture masquerades as "Hebrew." This garbled lingua franca characterizes Hollywood's *fata morgana* versions of the Holy Land. *Hanna K.* is unsurprisingly true to Hollywood's linguistic cannibalism, substituting English for disparate national languages. As George Steiner observes: "Intentionally or not, American English and English, by virtue of their global diffusion, are a principal agent in the destruction of natural linguistic diversity."[4] *Hanna K.* assumes a cultural universe of discourse in which the syntax and morphology of English devours Hebrew, a linguistic colonialism that ironically extends to the US's staunchest ally, Israel. The brief snippets of Arabic, meanwhile, are subtitled, creating an unequal and artificial dichotomy. Furthermore, Costa-Gavras reveals his ignorance of the linguistic realities of Israel when he suggests that Hanna, the Israeli, blithely assumes that Selim, the film's archetypal Palestinian, does not speak Hebrew. The prevalent English dialogue, therefore, points not only to the compromised nature of this French-US coproduction, but also creates an ideological homogeneity in which Israel and the West become practically indivisible.

The film, consequently, reinforces the petrified assumption that Israel and the United States are as inseparable as David and Jonathan. An absolute identification of the two countries is reductionist in nature, and views Israel as a monolithic political entity without specific interests of its own. *Hanna K.* also ignores the schism between East and West that exists among Jews in Israel by Portraying Israel as an exclusively Western entity. Forming 65% of the Jewish population, Oriental Jews who immigrated to Israel mainly from Arab and Muslim countries have been denied access to political power by the Ashkenazi elite. Culturally linked to the Arab world, they also form a potential source of political transformation in the area. By almost completely excluding Oriental Jews from the narrative and *mise-en-scène,* Costa-Gavras continues hegemonic patterns of representing Israel. The only presence of Oriental Jews involves a brief appearance by Hanna's maid, a marginalization reminiscent of Hollywood's traditional depiction of black characters. Ironically, even more conservative Hollywood films such as *Alice Adams* (1935) and *Gone with the Wind* (1939) tended to devote more narrative time and dialogue to blacks than the "liberal" *Hanna K.* spends on equivalent figures.

The monolithic view is perpetuated on another level when positions of both the Likud and Labor parties are fused into the character of Professor Leventhal, an acquaintance of Hanna. His diatribe recapitulates mainstream Zionist ideology, and pithily invokes the dogma shared by Ben Gurionists as well as Beginists: ". . . Miss Kaufman prefers tragedy. What is your alternative? Give citizenship to anyone who asks for it? Make us live as a minority in a sea of Arabs? Cram us into a new ghetto? Your family (not a bad idea to remember) also had its share in the Holocuast. Now at least we have a country, an identity, and we must defend it." In other words, the Holocaust, the official memory of Israel, is displaced into a different context. Dismissing Palestinian rights is justified in the terms of European-Jewish victimization, while ignoring the vastly different experience of Jews in Arab countries. Leventhal introduces a false determinism that links European-Jewish misery with an inevitable dispossession of Palestinians, thus leading the "leftist" director to exclude truly progressive positions. At the same time, the film presents the Palestinian ideology only as it is constructed by Leventhal's speech, and

not through Selim, the ostensible focus of narrative attention. *Hanna K.,* ironically, provides a more succinct expression of the European-Zionist perspective than the vicissitudes of the Palestinian position it is supposedly advocating.

In a lengthy review of *Hanna K.,* Edward Said suggests that the film's "political message overrides its aesthetic problems." This artificial separation would seem to contradict Said's own subtle reflections on aesthetic questions in *Beginnings* and *The World, the Text and the Critic,* works that make explicit the relationship between textual analysis and ideological critique. Yet, in his own review he praises *Hanna K.* for its positive depiction of the anguished Palestinian. As we have already observed, however, the portrayal of the Palestinian forms part of a long tradition of representing the Orient, an issue discussed brilliantly in Said's *Orientalism.* The film's significance, then, cannot be attributed to the depiction of a "noble Palestinian." In fact, if compared to *Circle of Deceit* and *The Little Drummer Girl,* which merely use the Middle East as a backdrop, *Hanna K.* emerges as creditable in its effort to "allow us to witness the Palestinian quandary as a narratable human history."[5] *The Little Drummer Girl,* for example, blurs political distinctions by emphasizing the savagery of both Israelis and Palestinians. This view assumes the superiority of the West to the "little wars" of "irrational" nations. This cynical stance is at least not shared by *Hanna K.,* which along with films such as Tawfiq Saleh's *The Dupes* (1971) and Uri Barabash's *Beyond the Walls* (1984), attempts to disinter what has been hidden from history.

—RICHARD PORTON
AND ELLA SHOCHAT

NOTES

1. See "Colonialism, Racism and Representation," *Screen,* Vol. 24, No. 2 (March-April, 1983). Also "Slow Fade to Afro: The Black Presence in Brazilian Cinema," *Film Quarterly,* Vol. XXXVI, No. 2 (Winter 1982-3).

2. Joan Borstein, *Jerusalem Post,* Nov. 10-12, 1983, International Edition.

3. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978).

4. George Steiner, *After Babel* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 470.

5. Edward Said, "Hanna K.: Palestine with a Human Face," *Village Voice,* October 11, 1983.

LIQUID SKY

Produced and directed by Slava Tsukerman. Screenplay by Tsukerman, Anne Carlisle and Nina V. Kerova. Photography: Yuri Neyman. Editor: Sharyn Leslie Ross. Music: Tsukerman, Brenda I. Hutchinson, and Clive Smith. Cinevista, Inc.

The first narrative film of Russian émigré Slava Tsukerman, *Liquid Sky,* is at heart a love story, albeit an unusual one. The central character Margaret (Anne Carlisle) eventually comes to love the space creature whose search for food—first heroin then opiate-like chemicals released in the brain during orgasm—has led it to her roof. The significance of Margaret's love is that it rescues her from a world of debased human relationships and finally transfigures her own being. Margaret is a member of the New Wave subculture as it exists in New York City. On the surface, she moves in a world of frenzied hair styles, bizarrely painted faces, and eccentric costuming. But, inwardly, she lives in a world where nourishment has been reduced to food, love to sex, and self-transcendence to heroin-induced highs. Yet Tsukerman handles his main character and her rather sordid world so that they present a vision of human possibility, a vision he sustains with exceptional cinematic style.

Tsukerman's vision is more convincing in our cynical age, perhaps, because it presents an existence shorn of ready possibilities. When we meet her, Margaret is already disaffected with her suburban Connecticut upbringing, and she is now experiencing a deeper alienation in the New Wave culture she has escaped to. Sexually, she is assaulted by those she hates: a Quaalude-dispensing creep and a heroin addict. She is forced in varying degrees by those she loves or likes: her professor and former lover, her lesbian partner and roommate, her fellow fashion model and male look-alike, Jimmy. As a model, Margaret out-Herods the extremest fashion looks of *Vogue,* and in a brilliant montage of stills Tsukerman treats us to a peacock display of New Wave fashions. But the drug-laden photography session of *Midnight Magazine* descends into a sadomasochistic sexual taunting of Jimmy and Margaret with the magazine personnel ringed round full of voyeuristic expectancy. So neither traditional society nor the New Wave underground, neither sexual engagement nor professional attainment offer Margaret sustenance. She finds